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SUBJECT: UKRAINIAN CHARGE ON LUKASHENKO-YUSHCHENKO MEETING
PROSPECTS

REF: KYIV 478

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Ukrainian Charge Aksana Kitsun assured DCM March 5 that the Ukrainians want any meeting between Presidents Yushchenko and Lukashenko to bring concrete, positive results. She reported that Ukrainian Presidential Secretariat Deputy Head for Foreign Policy Oleksandr Chaliy

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met with Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko on February 22 in Minsk to discuss plans for that meeting.

12. (C) According to Kitsun, Chaliy raised the importance of the release of political prisoners with Lukashenko, who allegedly responded that a shortening of former opposition presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin's five and one-half-year sentence might be possible. Separately, Kitsun noted that possible dates for the visit would be March 16 or 19; DCM pointed out that the latter date will be the one-year anniversary of the stolen presidential elections in 2006.

Comment

13. (C) Kitsun, who said that Chaliy is a strong contender for the post of Ukrainian Foreign Minister, found it interesting that Lukashenko received Chaliy when he had refused to meet with Ukrainian Presidential Secretariat Head Viktor Baloha (Chaliy's boss) during a previous visit; she was prepared to interpret that as a sign of some flexibility on Lukashenko's part, a view we are not ready to endorse. We defer to Kyiv to judge Chaliy's credibility and professional prospects; the idea that anyone has been able to get Lukashenko thinking about leniency with regard to political prisoners is interesting, although as of this writing Kozulin's sentence remains unchanged.
Stewart